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ACT Recognizes Tennessee for “Unusual and Impressive” Test Gains

NASHVILLE—Tennessee’s composite ACT score showed its largest gain in more than a decade, and increased more than it has since the state began testing all students in 2010, according to scores released today by ACT. Officials with ACT called the 0.3 gain “noteworthy.”

“Tennessee’s average ACT composite score growth of 0.3 is statistically significant and indicative of real academic progress,” said Jon Erickson, ACT president of education and career solutions. “A gain of this size is unusual and impressive – particularly for a state that administers the test to all students.”

Tennessee’s composite ACT score for public school students rose from 19.0 to 19.3. For all students, which includes those who attend private school, the average composite score increased from 19.5 to 19.8.

These gains correlate with recent academic growth in high school on the 2014 Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program, or TCAP. For instance, proficiency in Algebra II grew nearly 6 percentage points over 2013, and more than 17 percentage points since the state began testing students three years ago. Nearly 50 percent of Algebra II students are on grade level, up from 31 percent in 2011. More than 13,000 additional Tennessee students are on grade level in Algebra II than when we first administered the test in 2011.

“These ACT scores show us that the work students and teachers are doing across the state is paying off, and will lead to real improvements for Tennesseans,” said Gov. Bill Haslam. “Offering two free years of college to the state’s high school graduates through our Tennessee Promise initiative is only successful if students finish high school ready for college. We must continue to make certain that happens.”

Richard Bayer, assistant provost and director of enrollment services for the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, said this year’s ACT scores are encouraging.

“As an enrollment officer who views academic achievement levels on a regular basis, a 0.3 jump would be a very significant increase in measuring the academic performance level of an incoming freshman class,” Bayer said. “As a state, we should view the score jump as very significant and a testimony to our upward trajectory in preparing more students to be college ready for degree completion.”

Tennessee is one of 12 states that require all students to take the ACT. While the composite ACT score showed that all students grew, the 2014 results point to the continued need to close achievement gaps for certain groups of minority students; the average ACT composite score for Hispanic students was 18.0, and the average for black students was 16.4.

“Gains on the ACT—especially when they are historic for our state—are always encouraging,” said Education Commissioner Kevin Huffman. “The hard work of teachers to implement higher academic standards is having an impact. But the reality remains that only 16 percent of our students graduate from

high school prepared to take college courses without remediation. We must continue to press forward with improvements to our education system so we can ensure that our students are ready to take advantage of the opportunities that await them.”

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